

Summary of Local Workshops

In cooperation with Grasslands subarea farmers, WWD, and TLDD, SJVDIP staff held three workshops in 1996 to obtain local perspectives on problems and potential solutions in each drainage subarea. The goal was to identify ways that growers, districts, SJVDIP, and others could help resolve the complex drainage problems in the Valley. At the workshops, options recommended in the 1990 *Plan* and others not recommended at that time, such as drainage water treatment, simplification of monitoring and regulations, and out-of-valley disposal, were briefly discussed and comments were solicited from workshop participants. Participants then ranked each option discussed. The top five options were then reviewed for recommendations on the role of government agencies and others in achieving solutions. A detailed report on each workshop was submitted to workshop participants for review.

The following is a summary of the workshop reports organized by option heading, as prepared by SJVDIP staff.

Source Control

In the Grasslands and Tulare/Kern subarea workshops, the overall view was that much progress has been made in drainage reduction through source control and that this progress was driven by reduced water supply and increased costs. Further progress is limited by the influx of drainage from upslope sources and adjacent properties, further development of applicable technology, and the need to leach salts from the rooting zone. Recorded comments in the Westlands workshop on source control were limited to suggestions for participant roles.

Drainage Reuse

Grasslands and Tulare/Kern subarea workshops participants expressed skepticism about the practicality of drainage reuse agroforestry techniques. Problems cited included feasibility of implementation, lack of experience, lack of sufficient acreage, impact of long-term increase in soil salinity, and lack of a market for the products.

In the Westlands subarea workshop, two participants advocated developing the drainage reuse agroforestry system and the need for studies to identify potential uses of salt.

Evaporation Systems

There are no evaporation ponds in the Grasslands subarea and no interest in constructing any. Other solutions were suggested as being more desirable (see Table 13).

In contrast, evaporation ponds were recognized as an essential component of sustaining agriculture for the Tulare/Kern subarea. Progress has been made in mitigating impacts to waterfowl. Problems cited were inadequate recognition of success and an excessive and inconsistent regulatory burden. Participants suggested that the SJVDP recommendation for pond closure was not needed and could not be implemented.

Evaporation ponds were viewed as a viable option in the Westlands subarea, but streamlined regulations and an umbrella permit would be needed before implementation could occur.

Land Retirement

Interest in land retirement ranged from virtually unanimous opposition in the Grasslands subarea to a limited participatory interest in the Westlands subarea. The Tulare/Kern subarea was generally opposed to land retirement as a drainage-reduction option. Many issues and problems with this option were identified, including postretirement management, dispensation of water rights, source of funds for purchase and operation, impact to adjacent land remaining in production, and impact to local economies and the environment. Strong philosophic opposition was expressed. Favorable suggestions included wetland and wildlife habitat mitigation credit from land retirement or transfer of water rights to other productive agricultural land.

Groundwater Management

Groundwater management was not viewed favorably as a drainage-reduction option in either the Grasslands or Tulare/Kern subareas. Limitations included poor-quality groundwater, degradation of higher-quality groundwater, subsidence, increased soil salinity, and difficulty of implementation. The overall view was that groundwater management would be ineffective and unnecessary. In the Westlands subarea, limited interest was expressed in further research on this option.

Discharge to the San Joaquin River

In the Grasslands subarea, the importance of completing the Grasslands Bypass Channel as an extension of the Drain was emphasized, although not as a long-term solution. Also stressed was the need for suitable water quality regulatory standards upon completion of the Grasslands Bypass Channel.

In the Westlands subarea, the idea of large reservoir disposal of drainage into the River was proposed, but did not receive any votes. Discharge to the River was not considered an available option in the Tulare/Kern subarea.

Protection and Restoration of Fish and Wildlife Habitat

In the Grasslands and Tulare/Kern subareas, protection and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat was recognized as an important benefit for all segments of society and not a burden imposed only on agriculture. Much has been accomplished in this area, including the wildlife provisions of CVPIA, the plan for the Grasslands Bypass Channel, improvements to evaporation ponds, and development of compensatory wetlands. Difficulties are associated with allocating already scarce water supplies and contributing to the drainage problem by wildlife areas. The Westlands subarea workshop did not discuss this option.

Institutional Changes

Tiered Water Pricing. Tiered water pricing was not viewed favorably in the Westlands and Tulare/Kern subareas. In Westlands, tiered water pricing was deemed unnecessary to an existing water management program. In Tulare/Kern, tiered water pricing was considered economically infeasible and unnecessary given the reality of a limited water supply. In the Grasslands subarea, tiered water pricing has been successfully implemented as part of an overall water management program necessitated by a reduced water supply.

Water Transfers and Marketing. Grasslands subarea growers favorably viewed water transfers and marketing, within a free market and a streamlined regulatory process, as a way to meet water quality standards and benefit fish and wildlife habitat. No comments were received on water transfers and marketing in the Westlands and Tulare/Kern workshops.

Regional Drainage Management Organizations. Formation of a regional drainage management organization has been successfully accomplished in the Grasslands subarea. The importance of local or individual control was stressed in the Tulare/Kern and Westlands workshops.

Improved Delivery Schedule. The improved delivery schedule option for drainage reduction was regarded as impractical and infeasible in the Tulare/Kern subarea. The option was not addressed in the Grasslands and Westlands workshops.

Treatment of Drainage Water

The viewpoint in all three subareas, Grasslands, Westlands, and Tulare/Kern, was that while not presently viable or cost-effective for widespread or large-scale implementation, continued research and testing of drainage water treatment options holds promise for future benefits. Increased funding and information exchange is needed.

Caution was expressed that advances in removing selenium neither solve the salt problem nor treat toxic levels of other trace elements.

Simplify Monitoring and Regulations

The need to simplify regulations, reduce monitoring costs and compliance, and consolidate requirements under one regulatory agency (CVRWQCB) was generally supported in the Grasslands, Westlands, and Tulare/Kern workshops.

Out-of-Valley Disposal

The out-of-valley drainage disposal alternative was unanimously advocated in the workshops as the only viable, long-term solution to the drainage problem in the Grasslands and Westlands subareas and strongly advocated second only to evaporation ponds in the Tulare/Kern workshop. Participants stressed that the out-of-valley option would best serve the interests of society as a whole and benefit wildlife, the general public, and agriculture. The need to develop this alternative in a manner that would not harm the ocean and allay the concerns of downstream water users and the general public was viewed as both an essential and attainable goal.

Comments on the 1990 *Management Plan*

Several comments on the 1990 *Plan* were received, mainly at the Tulare/Kern workshop. The primary concern, as expressed by workshop participants, is “the limitations of the recommendations in the 1990 *Plan*.” The 1990 *Plan* “represented the state of drainage knowledge at the time” and, although “much new information has been developed since then, recommendations in the original report are being used in administrative and judicial proceedings and given a deference which they probably do not warrant.”

The recommendation was made for SJVDIP to “identify any potential weakness in the 1990 *Plan* recommendations; disseminate that information to the interested public; and update, modify, or eliminate recommendations in accord with new information.”

Recommendations for the Role of Government

Many suggestions regarding the role of government in solving the drainage problem were offered at all three workshops. In general, government agencies were implored to be more proactive and less regulatory. Specifically, growers requested government support for a fair review of all issues pertaining to the out-of-valley drainage disposal alternative, assistance in educating the public, support for scientific research, and development of cost-share programs and cooperative projects that will implement techniques and treatments for eventual out-of-valley drainage disposal.

Ranked Options

Workshop participants were given seven votes to distribute on one or more options and were asked to rank the options discussed. Tables 13, 14, and 15 show the ranked options for each subarea, the number of votes for each option, and the number of people voting on each option.

Table 13—Grasslands Subarea Workshop Ranked Options

	(Votes)/# of people voting
1. Out-of-Valley Disposal	(all)/all
2. Discharge to San Joaquin River	(41)/12
3. Source Control	(17)/8
4. Simplifying Regulations	(14)/8
5. Treatment of Drainage Water	(13)/6
6. Protection & Restoration of Fish & Wildlife	(7)/2
7. Land Retirement	(7)/2
8. Water Transfers & Marketing	(4)/1
9. Groundwater Management	(3)/3
10. Drainage Reuse	(2)/2

Table 14—Westlands Subarea Workshop Ranked Options

	(Votes)/# of people voting
1. Out-of-Valley Disposal	(all)/all
2. Land Retirement	(17)/5
3. Evaporation Ponds/Tile Drains	(13)/5
4. Simplifying Regulations	(13)/8
5. Source Control	(8)/4
6. In-Valley Reuse/Recycling	(7)/2
7. Drainage Water Treatment	(6)/4
8. Agroforestry	(4)/2
9. Shallow Groundwater Management	(2)/1

Table 15—Tulare and Kern Subareas Workshop Ranked Options

	(Votes)/# of people voting
1. Evaporation Ponds	(43)/14
2. Out-of-Valley Disposal	(22)/10
3. Drainage Water Treatment	(10)/7
4. Simplifying Regulations	(10)/8
5. On-Farm Drainage Water Reuse	(4)/2
6. Source Control	(3)/2
7. SJVDP Recommendations	(2)/1
8. Land Retirement	(1)/1
9. Wetlands Water Supply	(1)/1
10. Water Marketing	(1)/1